

A Farewell to Arms

~Ernest Hemingway

Critical Reception

Early critics of the novel emphasized its realistic picture of war and disagreed over the effectiveness of Hemingway's laconic literary style. A number of critics were squeamish about the frank language and sexual situations Hemingway presented. *A Farewell to Arms* was in fact banned in Boston in its first serialization in *Scribner's Magazine*. By the 1940s, however, proponents of the New Criticism had begun to do closer textual studies of *A Farewell to Arms*, finding it rich in language, symbolism, and irony. Other critics praised Hemingway's narrative structure and explored themes such as the conflict between abstract ideas (like honor and service) and concrete experience with love and death.

The 1970s and early 1980s saw a new flurry of Hemingway scholarship after his papers and manuscripts were opened to the public at the John F. Kennedy Library, allowing insight into Hemingway's processes of composition. In the early 1970s, feminist critics began to lambast Hemingway for his treatment of the character of Catherine, whom they saw as little more than a projection of male needs and desires. Her relative lack of development, compared with Frederic's evolution as a character, was called a weakness in the novel. In answer to feminist critics, others argued that one should not judge the novel from a particular ideological framework. In the 1980s and 1990s, criticism shifted back to close analyses of the text itself and explorations of the ways in which Hemingway's life and the culture in which he lived influenced the novel. Reader-response critics sought to infer what Hemingway expected from readers, psychoanalytic critics delved into the character of Frederic, and deconstructionists noted subtle uses of language, which often masked deep meanings not at first evident.

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